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What Fight Ye For?

ADDRESS

Delivered to the

12th Company, Mass. Coast Artillery, N. G.

—— AT ——

St. Mary's Cathedral, Fall River, Mass.

JULY 27th, 1917

—BY—

Rt. Rev. James E. Cassidy, V. G.

On the eve of the Company's departure
for Fort Banks, Mass.

In answer to many requests, this address is here published in form for distribution chiefly among the Soldiers and Sailors of the United States Army and Navy. May God guard them and through them our beloved country.

Gift
Author
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"If you go forth to war out of your land against the enemies that fight against you, you shall sound aloud with the trumpets, and there shall be a remembrance of you before the Lord, your God, that you may be delivered out of the hands of your enemies." Numbers x, 9.

The words of our Lord spoken to Moses as an everlasting ordinance apply with fullest effect to you, members of the 12th company, gathered here on the eve of your going "forth to war out of your land against the enemies that fight against you."

In the dispensation of divine Providence, the darkest days of human history have fallen upon the civilized world. Wars and rumors of war; nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom and the end is not yet. Pride and arrogance and insolence and lust of power and domination long hidden in the heart of nations have slipped the leash of timely waiting and with arms and armament and ammunition, with sword and scimitar and sabre, with deadly fume and poison gas, upon the earth and under the water and in the air, white and black and yellow and red, Christian and pagan and Moslem vie with one another for mastery, in bloody death strife.

For well nigh three long years, across the wide expanse of ocean, with fearful, fearing souls we watched this consuming conflagration and prayed that its fires might die away ere the whole world become a holocaust. Injury and insult, yea, infamy we suffered, our peaceful souls revolting from this sight of humanity slaughtering itself, hoping and trusting and praying that means compatible with honor might be found to avoid our adding our portion to the seas of human blood that were alike crimsoning a continent and bleeding white a world of peoples.

Our rights were transgressed, our commerce interrupted, our properties destroyed, our safety jeopardized, our citizens slain,—and yet we kept the peace. We objected, we remonstrated, we protested, we threatened, but to no purpose.

Forced Into War.

Our patience and long-suffering were misinterpreted. Our horror of war and our love of peace were thought to be born of a lack of courage to fight. War was being made continually upon us. Blow after blow was struck against our sovereign rights until the hour arrived, when, all other means exhausted, we must either defend ourselves by force, or forever forfeit our right to take our place among the nations of the earth. Even then some, whose motives I shall not judge, counselled submission and continued toleration of wrong. Thank God their counsels did not prevail. Dark though be the hour and sad though be our hearts as we face the bloody future how infinitely darker would be the days and how filled with shame and ignominy the future if we had been led by those who would have had peace at any price? The words of our Lord in the Gospel: "What shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (Matt. xvi, 26), I cannot refrain from applying to our nation's situation last April. For if our President and our Congress had not then acted as they did, we should have been a soulless nation and shame and reproach and everlasting infamy would have been the profit of our peace. But the nation did not sell its soul for peace. We loved not

war but we loved dishonor less, and when compelled to choose we unhesitatingly, though regretfully, chose war. And in the chosen words of Holy Writ: "You go forth to war out of your land against the enemies that fight against you."

Clad in your nation's uniform, before the altar of the Eucharistic Christ, answering the trumpet's sound, on the eve of going forth to war, you kneel for God and country.

"Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's!" And you are here, members of the 12th Company, Mass. Coast Artillery, to lay upon the altar of your God all that you have, even to life itself, for your country's love and honor.

A Fight for Freedom.

When men ask you: "What fight ye for?" tell them, in tones that shall wake up the dead of '76: "I fight for liberty, for freedom's sake, for righteousness, for all my country's flag has ever represented. I fight for peace, that justice may prevail, that frightfulness and inhumanity may not possess the earth. Out of the mart and mill and meadow I have come, no warrior by profession but peace-loving and peace-keeping citizen, roused by my country's call, to serve her with my all; to struggle, to suffer, to die if need be that her cause may live, that might shall not prevail, that right shall not forever perish from the earth." And if anyone shall dare to ask you why you sacrifice for country's sake tell them in voice that shall admit no question: "I give to her, my country, because she hath given all to me. After God she has given me life; after God she has protected me; her children that have come and gone before me have withstood the summer's heat and the winter's cold, have struggled and suffered and bled and died that I might be a freeman. My forefathers she received with open arms; tenderly she nursed them; liberty, justice and equality she gave them; the shield of her protection she set up before them; with her life's blood did she guard them; the right to worship God untrammeled and unrestrained she ensured to them; she gave them place, distinction, honor, all, reserving nothing, and now, when she's in need and calls to me, with all I have quickly answer, 'Here, sir.'" That's a soldier's answer to a slacker's "Why?"

Popularity No Measure of Righteousness.

And here, if you will allow me time, I would give answer to those who would seemingly discredit your sacrifice by telling you that this is an unpopular war.

What war was ever popular in the sense that they would have it? Was the war for independence popular? Was the war for the preservation of the Union popular? Was the Spanish war popular? Popularity is no measure of righteousness. Fighting with and killing each other is popular only with savages, and brave men do not anticipate with joy the slaughtering of their brethren. Someone has truly said that war is hell and hell is hardly popular with anyone. We abhor war but we thank God that we have not yet arrived at that decadent and degenerate condition wherein we would suffer anything rather than fight. God forbid that we should ever consider peace more honorable or more desirable than righteousness! God forbid that we should purchase peace with dishonor. God make us ever abhor war but God keep us from ever becoming too cowardly to fight.

Time for Individual Judgment Passed.

Again some would lessen your merits by maintaining that we should have never gone into this war. To these I have already given answer but to those now I say in shorter words, "The time for discussion as to the propriety of our entering the war has passed. This is a representative government. We delegate others to represent us. We elect a President to lead us. Our President and our Congress, with much wider knowledge of events, and with as great abhorrence of war as we have, have decided that a state of war exists. Who are we that we should pit our individual judgment against the decision of those whom we have legally and voluntarily constituted our representatives? Democracy demands delegation of power and should we refuse to abide by the decision of those whom we have delegated to speak for us what confusion would come upon us! If Russia today is wrecked in ruins it is because this very exercise of individual judgment has made chaos of organized government and if we were to pay attention to every individual judgment we, too, would shortly become another Russia. Therefore I say the time for individual judgment has passed. Whatsoever previous opinions we may have entertained they should now be laid aside and we should all follow the flag in unquestioned and in unquestioning loyalty. You see I dare to speak of matters rarely publicly discussed nor have I yet said all.

Our War, Not England's.

There is something else which should be said and I trust I am not amiss when I say it. There are too many of varied ancestry, too many of ancestry, if you will, like to mine, Irish-Americans, whose judgment is blinded by their hatred toward England. Let them beware lest their animosity toward England be interpreted as disloyalty to the United States.

Out of the loins of a Fenian, arrested in arms against the English, I came. I was nursed at the breast of as true an Irishwoman as ever came out of Ireland. Indelibly written in my soul is the story of England's rule of blood and iron in Ireland. But what has that to do with the honor of my own country? Incidentally and accidentally we may be fighting for England just as England now is fighting for us, but essentially and fundamentally we are not fighting for England, we are fighting for ourselves. Had Germany by its own overt acts, repeated again and again, not made it impossible for us to keep peace with honor, had she respected our rights, had she not murdered our citizens, she might have beaten England to her knees and we would not have interfered. We did not go to war to save England,—we went to war to save ourselves, to save our sovereign rights, to save all and everything that a nation in honor prizes. You men of all births, for there are men of many bloods and births bearing a grievance against England, in your blind desire for retribution, you forget that in this war all must stand or fall together. If England stands we stand; if England falls we fall; victory and honor or defeat and dishonor shall come upon all alike. And God forbid that there should be any so base and low and blinded as to strike at the heart of England through the soul of their own country! God forbid that there should be any who would rejoice at the losses of any of the Allies when they know that such losses mean only greater losses and multiplied deaths among you soldier sons. Let this insanity pass forever from these states.

Faithful to Christ and Country.

But let these matters not disturb your spirit or swerve you from your lofty purpose. You have buckled on the armor of righteousness, you have raised aloft the banner of the Stars and Stripes, you have vowed to do and die for the liberty, the justice, the freedom for which we have ever stood, and I know that you will all be faithful unto death. I know that you will render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, but will you render to God the things that are God's? That is the question that is in my heart tonight.

"What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" And many there are today who are going out to save their country and to lose their own souls! Many there are who will be true indeed to their country but will be false to God! Many there are who will honor the Stars and Stripes with their life-blood but who will make a mockery of Jesus Christ! Many there are who will be faithful to the flag but who will be traitors to the cross and I would alike be a coward and a traitor to Christ did I fail to stamp this truth upon your soldier hearts.

For every tie that binds you to your country, there are a thousand ties that bind you to Christ. For every obligation you have to be faithful to the flag you have a thousand demanding your fidelity to the cross. For every temporal tie that binds you to the commander-in-chief of the army and navy of these United States you have a thousand eternal ties binding you to the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, the Lord of Hosts and God of Battles. I have said that many will be true to the flag and false to the cross. I'll correct that statement and I'll say that those who are false to the cross are false alike to the flag; that those who are false to God will be false alike to country. You are going out into what has been weakly described as an orgy of blood. You are going out, also, into an orgy of lust. Many of you are innocent and unsophisticated boys, delicately reared and sacredly preserved. In the midst of blood you will not falter but in the midst of lust we pray you may not fall! If you fall in one you are false in the other. Major General Leonard Wood, commander of the southeastern department, in a statement last Wednesday speaks with authority: "Moral and physical contamination is one of the greatest menaces to military efficiency." And the soldier or the sailor that goes out and wallows in impurity, the soldier or the sailor that goes out and contaminates his moral and physical being by sinning with fallen women, that man is not only false to God who has said "Thou shalt not" but he is false to his country who says to him: "Give me the best that thou hast." Two hundred thousand soldiers of one nation, I shall not name it, two hundred thousand soldiers of one nation invalided and made not only useless but a burden to their country in its sorest need with impure disease! Were these men patriots or were they lustiots? Not in France, not in England, not in Germany, not in Turkey, but in these United States, in this commonwealth of Massachusetts, whole lines of men waiting, not to confess to the priest in confession, but waiting to report to the camp doctor that they had been outside and sinned with women, that they might receive preventive treatment! They owed their Maker personal purity and they owed their country military efficiency and they sold both for a bawd and strumpet! I know I shall be criticized for speaking of these matters here but unless someone speaks the very stones of the streets will cry out! And the sad part of it is that when

the national government, in a spirit only of self-defense endeavors to stamp out this evil, it gets little or no co-operation from the local authorities. Says Major General Wood: "When the local authorities are unable or unwilling to take the necessary measures to eradicate this evil they should at least restrict it to the smallest possible area." God guard you, soldier boys, from dangers infinitely worse than physical death. Your mothers and your sisters and your wives gladly give you up to die if need be for our country's honor but how shall their sacrifices be shamed if they learn that moral death has overtaken you?

Two Ideals—Divine and Human.

One word more and I have done. As you leave this holy place, ne'er, perchance to e'er return, two visions, two memories, I would stamp indelibly on your soldier-souls. The first is Christ upon the cross, his arms outstretched toward you in infinite love, bruised, bleeding, crucified, triumphing over sin and death to make you free. He is your God. Be you faithful to him unto death. The other is that most heroic figure of all these terrible times, Cardinal Mercier—wan of countenance and worn of body, yet with spirit unbroken and undimmed, he stands amidst the ruins of his devastated and desolated country, his sons murdered, his daughters violated, his children carried into captivity, his homes laid waste, every lash that falls upon his conquered people cutting thrice deep into his very soul. Yet undaunted, unterrified, unconquered, he faces his oppressors and says to them: "Draw your plans, set up your batteries, arrange your movements, propose as you will but God will ultimately dispose. My conviction, both natural and supernatural, of our ultimate victory is more firmly rooted in my soul than ever. We plighted our word that we should be neutral and to maintain our word of honor we have sacrificed our goods, our homes, our sons, our husbands, and after three years of coercion we are still as proud of our fidelity as when we first declared: 'Thou shalt not pass.'"

And this heroic figure, the very personification of patriotism and love of country, I hold out to you as your model and your ideal. No enemy boast, no enemy bribe, no enemy threat, no enemy pressure, no suffering, no want, no pain, no loss, no fear has shaken him from his high resolve to render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and unto God the things that are God's. Far away across the wide Atlantic he stretches out his arms to you for help against the common enemy. In the name of Jesus Christ go forth to do and die. God give you loyalty, God give you fortitude, God give you unflinching and unfailing courage to fight our country's cause. And God give you grace, God give you virtue, God give you self-sacrifice and self-restraint to fight gloriously alike for Him. The prayers of your loved ones follow you; the blessing of your church accompanies you; the gratitude, sympathy, support and sacrifice of a united people sustain you. Let the motto of those who go and those who stay forever be: "Let us all hold together in God."

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